

CUSTOMER ORIENTATION, BENEVOLENCE, AND PROSOCIAL SERVICE BEHAVIORS AMONG HOTEL EMPLOYEES IN CHINA

Miss LIU, Gloria Jing

Ph. D. Student
School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
USA
Email: gloria.liu@okstate.edu
Phone: 405-744-2355

AND

Dr. QU, Hailin

Regents Professor & William E. Davis Distinguished Chair
Director of the Center for Hospitality & Tourism Research
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism
School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
USA
Email: h.qu@okstate.edu
Phone: 405-744-6711/6713
Fax: 405-744-6299

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate the relationship of customer orientation (CO), benevolence, and prosocial service behaviors among the hotel employees in China. A review of literature of benevolence, CO, and prosocial service behaviors reveals that benevolence might be a significant antecedent of CO, while prosocial service behaviors a CO's consequence. Because the direct links of these three variables are seldom studied in the existing literature despite of their influences on positive work outcomes, this research is expected to fill in the research gap and provide some new implications for the hotel industry.

Key words: Customer orientation, benevolence, prosocial service behaviors, hospitality

INTRODUCTION

Customer orientation (CO) plays an important role in hospitality context. However, regardless of the essential role of CO in the hospitality sector, only limited studies have focused on understanding the concept within the hospitality field. Addressing the research scarcity, the main objective of this research is to develop a model (see **figure 1**) investigating the relationship of benevolence, CO, and prosocial service behaviors among the hotel employees in China. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- 1) examine the determinant effect of CO on prosocial service behaviors, i.e., role-prescribed customer service, extra-role customer service, and individual-directed organizational citizenship behavior (OCBI); **and,**
- 2) test the influence of benevolence on CO and prosocial service behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the CO research, its relationship with personality has received substantial attentions. However, benevolence is an exception. According to Donovan *et al.*'s (2004) recommendation of future exploration of benevolence and CO, we propose that benevolence might be a salient predictor to exert an influence on CO in the service context. Therefore, the authors advance the following hypotheses:

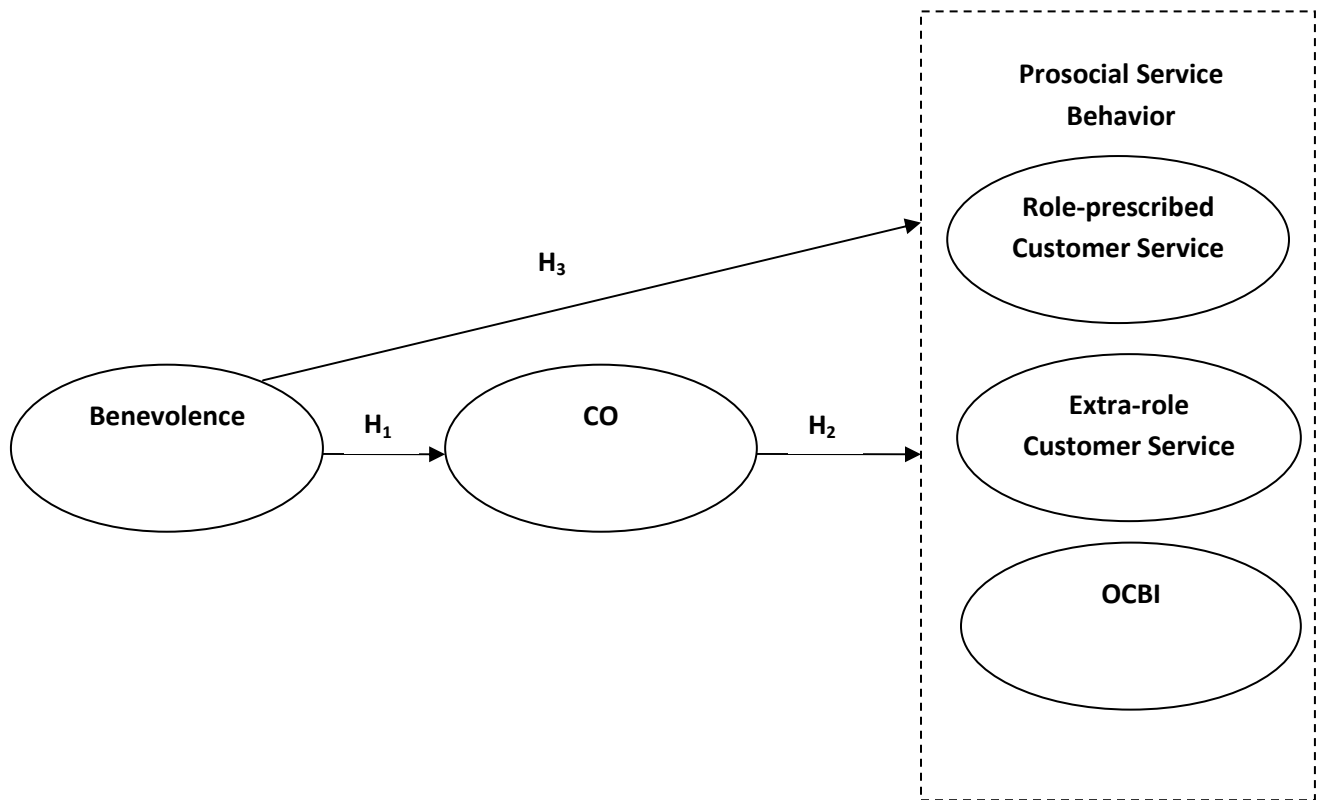
H₁: Benevolence has a positive influence on CO.

H₂: Benevolence has a positive influence on prosocial service behavior.

As indicated by Bettencourt and Brown (1997), there are three types of contact employee prosocial service behaviors that are assumed to be beneficial to the firm: role-prescribed customer service (in-role job performance), extra-role customer service (extra-role job performance), and OCBI (extra-role job performance). The literature provides the evidence that CO may have an impact on both role-prescribed job performance and extra-role job performance (Williams & Sanchez, 1998). Nevertheless, few studies have integrated the in-role job performance to the extra-role job performance in the CO research. Thus, the authors propose the following hypothesis:

H₃: CO has a positive influence on prosocial service behavior.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



METHODOLOGY

A closed-ended questionnaire will be used for data collection. Specifically, CO will be assessed in 13 items from Donovan *et al.* (2004). Benevolence will be operationalized with six items from Lee *et al.* (2004). Prosocial behaviors will be tested with 15 items from Bettencourt and Brown (1997). We adopted 7-point Likert-Type scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). In addition, the demographic information will also be collected in this study. Pilot tests will be conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of our measurement.

This research is a cross-sectional study. Employees from ten international-chain hotels in five top tourism destinations in China will be invited to participate in the survey. Hotel managers will be asked to distribute the questionnaires to their frontline employees by a convenience sampling method. A total of 400 questionnaires are expected to be acquired with a response rate of 80%. Descriptive analysis will be used to analyze the demographic data, while CFA and SEM will be performed to test the model with hypotheses.

LIMITATION

Several limitations of this study should be considered. The social desirability tendencies may lead to distorted responses to personality measures (measures of CO and benevolence). The single-source data that the study uses will be prone to common method variance. Due to the adoption of a convenient sampling method, the results may not well represent the whole sample population.

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